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The Sphinx  
and Other Poems

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William Henry Hudson

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For out of olde fables as men seith  
Cometh al this newe countrie peere to yere  
And out of olde booke in good seith  
Cometh al this newe science that men here

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THE SPHINX  
AND OTHER  
POEMS





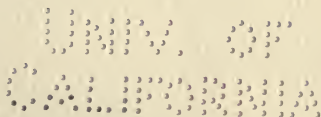
THE SPHINX  
AND OTHER  
POEMS

BY  
WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

ELDER & SHEPARD

SAN FRANCISCO

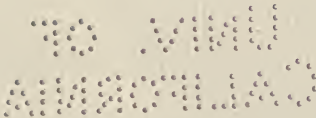
1900



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TO MY WIFE

PR6015  
H8455

BORN OF THE HEART, TO WHOM SHOULD IT BELONG,

1900

MY LITTLE BOOK OF SONG,

SAVE UNTO HER WHO HOLDS MY HEART IN FEE?

POOR THOUGH THE GIFT MAY BE,

THE GIVER, TOO, IS THINE. LOVE, FOR LOVE'S SAKE,

THIS SLENDER OFFERING TAKE!

396145



# Contents

DEDICATION	<i>Page</i> 5
THE SPHINX	11
ACHIEVEMENT	15
IN THE PLAZA, SANTA BARBARA	16
OUTLOOK	18
ORACLES	20
THE QUEST	22
LIMITATIONS	30
A CONTRAST	31
BY THE SHORE	32
THE LAND BEYOND THE WEST	33
UNAWARES	35
METHUSELAH	40
THRENODY	42
APPEARANCES	44
THE BROTHERS	45
QUATRAINS	
THE PLAY	55
BREEZE AND GALE	55
LANCELOT AND ELAINE	55
THE BUILDING	55
PAST AND PRESENT	56
MARY'S CRY	56
TO TENNYSON	56
THE CALIPH'S TOWER	56

*Contents*

## QUATRAINS

REALISM	<i>Page</i> 57
TO ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON	57
IRONY	57
“THE COMPLEAT ANGLER”	57
THE LIFTED VEIL	58
AT EARLY MORN	58
TO A SCIENTIFIC FRIEND	58
CRISIS	58
THE SEPULCHRE	59
FROM THE SABINE FARM	59
CARPE DIEM	59

The Sphinx  
and other  
Poems





## THE SPHINX

I HAD a dream in the night,  
Waking, how strange it seem'd!  
If I recall it aright,  
This is the dream I dream'd.

I know not how or why,  
But I walk'd in the desert alone;  
And ever the wind went by  
With a moan like a human moan.

Darkness hung o'er the world,  
Only I noticed soon  
A banner of cloud unfurl'd  
Over a phantom moon.

And I wist not whence I came,  
Nor whither my footsteps sped,  
In that land without a name,  
That country of the dead.

Then, sudden, a moonbeam burst  
Over the dismal place,  
And I saw, as one accurs'd,  
The Sphinx's great stone face;

Where cold, austere, sublime,  
Since first the ages ran,  
She watches the flight of time  
And the tragedy of man.

*The Sphinx*

Then by quick impulse quell'd,  
I fell upon the sands,  
And high in the dark upheld  
My clasp'd beseeching hands : —

“ Goddess! lone, sedate,  
Of the calm, remorseless eye,  
Crown'd Queen of mortal fate  
Till the last of things shall die!

“ Darkness engirts thy throne;  
Silence keeps ward the while.—  
Is that, on thy lips of stone,  
The flicker of a smile?

“ Dumb, while the long years speed —  
Dumb, while the ages go,  
Thy riddle still to read,  
Thy secret still to know.

“ Shall the prayers of men be vain?  
As naught shall their pleadings be?  
Struggle of heart and brain,  
And speechless agony?

“ Pity our mortal state,  
By ceaseless longings stirr'd!  
See how we stand and wait  
For the voice that is not heard.

“ Listen to this my cry,  
Which the empty silence drinks; —  
O whence, and whither, and why? —  
Listen, and answer, Sphinx! ”

Was that a voice from the sands  
That leagues about me spread?  
From the dim untrodden lands  
Of the unborn and the dead?

Did it out of the earth arise  
From the charnels and the shrouds?  
Did it drop from the heavy skies  
With the moonbeams through the clouds?

'T was the Sphinx herself that spoke;  
I knew her voice full well;  
And with her words she broke  
The immemorial spell: —

“ Would'st thou seek the veil to rend  
From the uttermost sense of things?  
Would'st thou know the beginning and end?  
Sources and hidden springs?

“ Would'st thou con the cryptic lore  
Of the unturn'd page of life?  
Would'st thou pierce to the central core  
Of the passion and the strife?

*The Sphinx*

“ O, wise in thine own conceit,  
Who think'st there is aught to find!  
Behold, the ways of thy feet  
Are but as the ways of the wind!

“ For beyond the limits of space,  
What is there, but space again?  
Look well upon my face!  
Dost thou ask, ‘ Shall my prayers be vain?’

“ From the silence that I hold  
Thou would'st my meaning tear?  
My riddle would'st unfold,  
And lay my secret bare?

“ Fool! thrice fool indeed!  
Back to thy folly go!  
Riddle? — There's none to read!  
Secret? — There's none to know!”

She ceased; and a vapour curl'd  
Over the face of the sky;  
And behold — no Sphinx — no world —  
Nothing — not even I!

If I recall it aright,  
This is the dream I dream'd.  
It did not seem strange in the night.  
Waking, how strange it seemed!

## ACHIEVEMENT

I TOIL'D all day in sun and shade,  
I Through the long hours I toil'd and wrought;  
And when the day was done, I thought  
Of patience shown, of progress made.  
It fill'd my heart with high content  
To measure my accomplishment.

I stood beneath the starry sky;  
I felt the hush'd night's cooling balm.  
There spoke a voice across the calm  
In accents of eternity.  
"O fool!"—I thought I heard it say—  
"What is it thou hast done to-day?"

## IN THE PLAZA, SANTA BARBARA

WAS ever day more heavenly-fair than this?  
More perfect in the subtly-woven charm  
Of gracious beauty? Blue, without a cloud,  
The sky o'erspans the blue unruffled sea;  
The long line of the mountains melts away  
Into the haze, as dreams will merge in dreams;  
And the breeze comes in little tender puffs,  
Balmy, and soft, and sweet, as if it blew  
From lotus-islands in far summer seas.

Surely, for once, the stormiest heart might find  
Rest; the sick brain surcease of all its woes.  
Surely, for once, I too might be content  
To live to-day just for the day itself;  
Bask in this sun, breathe deep this genial air,  
Drink to my fill of mountain, sky, and sea,  
Asking no questions, seeking naught beyond  
This scene, this hour, this present and its bliss;  
Else Paradise itself must prove a snare,  
And mock us with possession!

Yet, 'tis strange:—  
As my eye wanders round the coast, and dwells  
On Santa Rosa, blue against the blue,  
Mountain and sky and sea no more belong  
To this, my actual world, but shape themselves  
Into the vision of another day  
Divine as this, by fair Sorrento's shore;  
And, in a trance of memory, I o'erlive

Those dreamy hours beside the storied bay  
O'er which, as sentinel, Vesuvius  
Keeps watch and ward. Thus does the present call  
The dead past into life again, and blend  
Its deepest pleasure with the poignant sense  
Of other happiness in vanish'd years.  
And stranger still, the charm dissolves, to bring  
Only another stirring of the heart  
Like that I knew in boyhood; and, behold!  
Sky, sea, and mountain shape themselves anew;  
And now I loiter on untrodden strands  
And hear the wash of undiscover'd seas!

*In the Plaza  
Santa  
Barbara*

O Life, Life, Life! Must it be always thus?  
Will not the hour that is ever suffice?  
Will not its beauty ever satisfy  
The hunger and the thirsting of the soul?  
And must the best and sweetest touch of all —  
The finest essence of felicity —  
The inner thrill which lifts the earthly mood  
To kinship with a joy beyond itself —  
Be half regret for that which is no more,  
Half yearning for the things which may not be?  
O Life, Life, Life! must it be always thus?

## OUTLOOK

PERCH'D high, with narrow walls to hem me in,  
Amid the city's din,  
I often study with attentive eye  
Yon little patch of sky.

My little patch of sky I call the same,  
And do not count it blame;  
Others may have the wide-spread firmament,  
And therewith discontent.

But this one bit of heaven, this glimpse divine,  
Is now and always mine;  
By day my solace, and when day is done  
My nightly benison.

For every time I lift my head, it brings  
Whispers of far-off things,  
And a great flood of joy that passes ken  
Fills my whole being then.

When all is blue in my small patch, I say  
It will be fair to-day;  
When the clouds gather o'er its face again  
I dread the coming rain.

And sometimes in the watches of the night  
The slow stars wheel in sight;  
Or the round moon, as in the Wonderbook,  
Pauses awhile to look.



I do not miss the great world's pageantry  
Of forest, field, and sea,  
While I can have to love and live with, my  
Own little patch of sky.

*Outlook*

## ORACLES

I TAKE my question to the sea,  
And ask it there.  
The loud waves echo fitfully  
My own despair.

The deep voice of the forest swells  
In thunder-tone.  
Alas, the story that it tells  
Is but my own!

I sound the silent midnight sky,  
And, wearying not,  
I wait expectant for reply.  
It answers — what ?

Methinks, the oracles give word  
To my demand.  
Their speech I strive in vain, though heard,  
To understand.

What boots the message or the voice,  
The secret wrung ?  
While the dark Priestess still employs  
An unknown tongue ?

Could I but turn to mine own heart,  
And find some key  
To help me to spell out in part  
The mystery!

But can I trust it as I would  
With truth to bless ?  
Will it translate in certitude ?  
Or only guess ?

Ah, I have known the hour benign  
Of inward rest,  
When something spoke with voice divine  
Within the breast.

And when I bent the listening ear,  
'T was not in vain;  
The accents were familiar,  
The meaning plain.

Then, oh the thrill of joy that leapt  
Along the sea!  
A solemn song of gladness swept  
From tree to tree!

The night was beautiful above  
As ne'er before!  
I thought the oracles said "Love";  
And ask'd no more.

## THE QUEST

### I

IT was a vision — nay, no idle dream  
Which, bubble-like, breaks ere the break of dawn,  
To be henceforth forgotten: — no wild dream,  
But a celestial vision and a sign.  
That bending face was soft and beautiful  
Even beyond a youth's imaginings  
Of soft and beautiful in womanhood.  
And in those wistful eyes there lay the light  
Of love, which asks only for love's return.

When he awoke, alas! the vision, fled;  
Left naught to his embrace but empty air.  
Yet memory held the magic of her words: —  
“Lo, in a dream I come to proffer thee  
My love, and as a dream, I fade away.  
But be thou worthy of my proffer'd love,  
And thou shalt find me no light thing of dreams,  
No unsubstantial figment of the brain  
By fancy bred beneath the lids of sleep.  
Dost thou love me? — I may be woo'd and won!  
Follow and seek! Find me, and I am thine!”

As one who walks a city street at noon,  
And, 'mid the rush and din of busy life,  
Is haunted by a snatch of melody  
Heard when and where he knows not, but which  
brings  
A far-off hint of sunshine and the fields;

So was the youth haunted by those sweet words  
When daylight snapt the visionary spell.

“Follow and seek! Find me, and I am thine!”

O promise of an unsuspected bliss!

No marvel that his heart was stirr'd, his blood  
Set all a-flame; that the world's common things  
Look'd, by the contrast of that radiant face,  
The light of love deep in those wistful eyes,  
Beyond their wont tawdry and mean and dull!

Awhile he walk'd as though on summer air,  
Buoy'd by the thought of his high destiny,  
The love he was appointed to requite,  
And her, who to himself herself had given  
For seeking and for finding. Then, alas!  
The chill of doubt shot sudden through his veins,  
And blank despair usurp'd the place of joy.

“Follow and seek! Find me, and I am thine!”

O fair delusive hope—encouragement

With bitter disappointment fraught, and pain

Of all-too certain failure! Seek and find?

What empty words were these, which gave no clue,

And left the wide world open! Had she told

Her dwelling-place — had she but riddle-wise,

By mystic hint or half-breathed syllable,

Pointed the way by which the quest were won—

He had not falter'd. His the quest had been,

Yea, though to reach her he were forced to pass

Through fire and storm, o'er mountains lock'd in  
snow,

Across unmeasur'd seas and trackless sands.

*The Quest* But who shall answer to a phantom voice  
That calls to us we know not whence? or heed  
The uncertain beckoning of a ghostly hand  
That leaves us doubting to which side to turn?

So by the sweet face haunted still, his ears  
Still by the music of the voice caress'd,  
The youth was torn by strife within himself;  
And for a while, a traitor to his hopes,  
Letting the fear of failure, and weak sloth,  
And nerveless apathy o'er-master him,  
He shut the vision from him, and crush'd down  
The promptings it had stirr'd within his soul.  
What folly to give thought to that which still  
For all its beauty was but a mere dream!  
Should he for this wear out his fresh young life,  
Torture himself with unavailing toils,  
And like a starveling simpleton forego  
Delight of youth, and genial fellowship,  
Ease, and the tender love of other maids?  
What warrant had he that, if dreams spake true,  
The quest achiev'd should crown the sacrifice?  
Life must not wait on dreams. So Reason spake,  
Or what seem'd Reason; and the youth lent ear.  
But only for a time. One wistful face  
Came back to him in all its loveliness  
By night and day; one low, appealing voice  
By night and day set all his soul a-thrill —  
“Follow and seek! Find me, and I am thine!”  
And at the last he yielded to the charm.  
Courage was his, and the high faith of youth

That though to fail were easy, and to win  
Well-nigh impossible, he would not fail,  
But win. And in this ardent mood he rose;  
Made ready for the difficult emprise;  
Threw one last look towards his childhood's home,  
Bidding in thought farewell to all the joys  
Of hearth and field, to boon companions,  
And maidens who had woo'd him with their smiles;  
And thus self-consecrated to the pure  
Sweet service of a visionary love,  
Went forth undaunted on his lonely way.

## II

So the long years went by, and with them brought  
What the long years bring ever — joy and pain;  
Life, Death; the growing cold of many fires;  
Hopes, and the fading out of many hopes;  
Tears, and the drying up of many tears.

So the long years went by; with sowing-time  
And harvest; and the men who sow'd and reap'd  
In turn were reap'd, and others till'd their fields.  
But for the youth who set him forth that day  
On his high quest — him brought they not again;  
And his familiar place knew him no more  
Whether by summer brook or winter hearth.  
Though old men fumbling in their memories woke  
At times some dim remembrance of his name,  
Each asking each — "Who was he? Dost thou mind  
His face or stature? Wherefore went he forth?"

And what to find?'' One after one were these  
Gather'd to rest. So dull oblivion grew,  
Like moss about the headstone of a grave,  
Blotting all record of his name and life.

At last, one autumn eve, when the huge sun,  
Fierce red athwart the smoke of burning leaves,  
Hung for a moment o'er the western hills,  
And in strong flight the clamorous rooks wheel'd  
home;

Came from the world beyond those western hills  
A bow'd and white-hair'd man, for whom henceforth  
Life could hold naught but death. With tottering  
steps

And frequent pause, he crept along the way  
That downward to the hamlet led; and there,  
Upon a settle 'neath the churchyard yew,  
With deep-drawn sigh he sank, as one who knows  
The term is reach'd of his long pilgrimage.

The children play'd near by, and heeded not  
The stranger's coming; for he mov'd by stealth  
And spake not, watching them — the children, they,  
Of unborn children in that shadowy past  
Far-off, when he had romp'd, as now they romp'd,  
In guileless sport among their fathers' graves.  
Then the slow twilight gather'd close about him;  
The bell toll'd curfew; the loud laughter ceas'd;  
And he was left alone.



Was this the end ?

*The Quest*

The sum of all the heart-ache and the toil,  
Passionate strivings, faintings by the way,  
Hopes sown at random on each passing wind,  
Laborious days, and nights devoid of ease ?  
In the extremity of that sad hour  
He saw the grim vast folly of his life,  
The mad delusion that had wreck'd it all,  
When he had taken as a thing divine  
The phantom of a boy's disorder'd brain  
Love-sick for idleness and vague desire.  
O fool! — to chase a shadow, but to win  
Only a fool's well-merited reward —  
That wisdom of experience which comes  
Too late to be of service, and condemns  
When it is impotent to guide. — Fool! Fool!

One purpose still he cherish'd — to lie down  
Beneath the roof where first the vision came,  
And there, amid a thousand memories  
That even in the fierceness of his heart  
He held for dear, await that blessèd hour  
Which soon must bring what now alone he crav'd —  
Death and the peace thereof. He rose. The sky  
Throbb'd with unnumber'd stars. The hamlet slept  
About him, as he stole, poor weary ghost!  
Through the familiar ways. And now he reach'd  
The cottage of his youth; with trembling hand  
Push'd wide the door, and enter'd. All was dark,  
Save that upon the hearth a tiny fire  
Burn'd red. And, lo! beside the tiny fire

*The Quest*

There sat a woman crouch'd. His failing heart  
Gave one wild leap. Slowly she rais'd her head.  
No phantom, she, no shadow; but as fair,  
As young and fair as when, in dreams, she came  
To bid him seek her, aye, and finding, win.  
For that dear face was soft and beautiful  
Beyond an old man's fondest memory  
Of soft and beautiful in womanhood.  
And in those wistful eyes still lay the light  
Of love, which asks only for love's return.

“I have search'd for thee through the wide world,”  
he said;

“I have given my life in quest of thee. Behold,  
Now that my strength is spent, and death is near,  
Hither I come to lay my bones in peace  
Where once was home. This much is left — no  
more.

Where hast thou been that I have found thee not?  
And wherefore did'st thou come to me, and stir  
My longing for thee with delusive hopes,  
That in the hour of frenzy, heeding thee,  
Believing in thy promise and thy faith,  
I set my face towards thee, and my back  
To all that in the day of budding youth  
Life has to offer? Pleasant then was life,  
And rich its prizes. These I held as naught  
For thee, O fickle and heartless one! and thou  
Hast made of me thy dupe!”

He spake; and sadly did she make reply:—  
“Why did'st thou then go forth in quest of me?  
By thine own hearth, year after year, have I  
Waited for thee; and still thou did'st not come—  
By thine own hearth waited and watch'd; and  
mused

In the long vigils, ‘Nay, he will return  
And find me here, and I will welcome him,  
And evermore our lives shall be as one.’ ”

He bow'd his head in speechless agony  
Awhile. Then sudden, his thin arms outstretch'd,  
He stagger'd towards her, with a feverish gleam  
Flashing from his dim eyes. “But thou art mine,  
Now, at the last,” he cried. “Mock me no more!  
The quest is won! I have found thee! Thou art  
mine!”

“Too late,” she said. She spake as in reproof,  
Yet pity fill'd her voice with tenderness;  
“Too late! Too late!” — and faded from his  
sight.

And by the lonely hearth he sat, and wept.

## LIMITATIONS

COULD we grasp Life in all its stark and stern  
Reality,  
How could we live? Or, living, whither turn  
For remedy?

Not to ourselves dare we in silence breathe  
What things are done,  
Making each day's dark history, beneath  
The punctual sun!

'Tis well we cannot see them all-compact,  
Or we might fall,  
Brain-dazed, heart-sick, before the awful Fact,  
Blaspheming all

That Love has dream'd of Faith, and Faith has  
sought  
In Love to find.  
So were the larger vision dearly bought!  
The gods are kind.

They laid their limits on our mortal powers;  
And, this confess'd,  
To live our life as best we may is ours—  
Be theirs the rest!

## A CONTRAST

**B**ELOW—the midnight street, and two who  
pass'd,  
Holding high talk of life and destiny.  
—“Ay, though a million years be yet to run,  
At length must sound the hour of final doom,  
When the great sun, and all its circling worlds,  
And all their myriad life, shall sink in night  
Utter, eternal!—Lo, what then are we—  
The petty braggarts of a fleeting day—  
But insects crawling on an orange-rind;  
Who hug the childish fancy that there dwells  
Somewhere beyond this flux of mortal things,  
This ceaseless, sweeping tide of cosmic fate,  
One who still heeds the cry of breaking hearts  
And knows or cares whether we live or die!”

Above—a woman in a squalid room  
Watching with hard-drawn lips and tearless eyes  
The dead face of her only child: the hush  
Unbroken save by sound of lingering steps  
And voices in the street of two who pass'd  
Holding high talk of life and destiny.  
Till the wild grief no longer might be pent;  
And, sinking by the bed, she clasp'd her hands  
In frenzied gesture, moaning—“O my God!”

## BY THE SHORE

WAS it a dream? Did frolic fancy play  
An idle trick upon my soul that day?

In the rapt stillness of the eventide,  
Methought I heard—surely, I seem'd to hear,  
Held for a moment in the spirit's ear,  
Now hush'd—now rising to a swell once more—  
The lap of waters on some unknown shore  
Upon the further side.

Was it a dream?—I know not. This I know—  
The memory of that evening long ago,  
Though oftentimes I since have sought in vain  
To catch that wind-borne melody again,  
Has linger'd in my life, a sacred part  
Of all my deepest being; for to me,  
With some strange hint of some strange mystery,  
That murmur brought a solace for the heart  
An inward sense that everything was well,  
A touch of peace, of which no words can tell!

What secret doth the ocean hold in store  
Beyond its vast horizons, evermore?  
Friend! In the silence bend thou too thine ear,  
Listen and wait; if haply thou may'st hear  
That music to the noisier hour denied—  
The lap of waters on some unknown shore  
Upon the further side!

## THE LAND BEYOND THE WEST

AT sunset hour I turn my eyes  
In wonder to the western skies;—  
Behold, at some magician's touch  
The visionary splendours rise!

Sometimes I see a city set  
With tapering tower and minaret;  
Its streets are rich with glories, such  
As earthly city knows not yet.

And sometimes, lo, a mystic sea,  
Whereon no sail shall ever be;  
Over whose lambent waters rests  
The silence of eternity;

Or land of far untrodden steeps  
And rolling downs, and crevass'd deeps,  
And hills upon whose summit-crests  
A peace, we do not wot of, sleeps.

O magic dream! O thing divine!  
Stay, that I may but call thee mine!  
Or leave me some memorial  
To cherish as a heavenly sign!

But from the Night's unmeasur'd shore  
The ancient darkness surges o'er;  
The west is cover'd with a pall,  
The airy landscape is no more!

*The Land  
Beyond  
the West*

Yet still, as one by duty press'd,  
To that far land beyond the West  
Daily I fare — and presently  
Will come the ending of my quest.

I wonder will the vision stay  
Then, or for ever fade away ?  
Mine shall that world of glory be,  
Or empty darkness ? — Who shall say ?



## UNAWARES

I N days of old, as legends tell —  
For heaven and earth were nearer then —  
The gods would sometimes come to dwell  
A while with mortal men.

Unknown they mov'd, in simple guise,  
And mingled in the game of life;  
Yet watch'd with unimpassion'd eyes  
The tumult and the strife.

Save when one came to know in part,  
Through love, what love hath aye for gain—  
The hunger of the human heart,  
The passion and the pain.

Then in celestial eyes awoke  
A yearning not of heavenly birth;  
Serene, immortal beauty took  
The tenderness of earth.

. . . . .

Fair was the maid, with eyes that gleam'd  
Half-bashful through a mist of tears—  
A simple maid, and one who seem'd  
More lovely for her fears.

The light wind whisper'd soft and sweet  
Amid the glory of her hair;  
The fretted sunbeams kiss'd her feet  
As she stood trembling there.

*Unawares*

And the young shepherd, half-reclined  
Among the shadows cool and deep,  
Woke from his noontide dream to find  
Something more fair than sleep.

Then, while he waited, all-afraid  
Lest with a breath the spell might fail,  
In artless speech the tender maid  
Told all her artless tale.

A simple girl; but one whose charms  
Tempted a lawless robber-king,  
Who bore her from her father's arms  
Last night, a helpless thing.

But she, amid the drunken feast,  
Had haply fled, and all that morn  
Had wander'd, fearing man and beast,  
A creature all forlorn.

And now she wept that nevermore,  
Since all her prayers had been in vain,  
She thought to find her father's door  
Or touch his hand again.

While thus she begg'd his speedy grace,  
The shepherd, half-reclining there,  
Look'd silent on the blushing face,  
And found it wondrous fair.

So, when he spake, no words were his  
Of proffer'd help in all she pray'd.  
The burden of his tale was this—  
He lov'd the simple maid.

Kneeling, he press'd her yielding hand,  
And, passionate, urged the sudden whim—  
Could she forget her father's land  
And linger there with him ?

And wherefore not ? For love is sweet,  
And vainly do we say him nay.  
And wherefore not ? For youth is fleet,  
And beauty dies away.

His words were sweet; his voice was mild;  
His form a form of manly strength.  
The simple maiden blushing smil'd,  
And yielded all at length.

For love hath power o'er kindred hearts,  
And doth not urge his suit in vain.  
And wherefore not ? For youth departs,  
And comes not back again.

. . . . .

Next morning, ere the breaking day  
Had marr'd the dreaming boy's repose,  
Silent she mov'd from where he lay,  
And from the sward arose.

*Unawares*

Then strangely pass'd her simple mien;  
The yearning in her eyes grew deep.  
She stood and watch'd, a goddess-queen,  
Her mortal lover's sleep.

And smiling lay the happy boy,  
While whispering branches told above  
Of all the tenderness and joy  
That spring from twin-born love.

Alas! that youth's first dream must fade,  
Leaving a pang unfelt before.  
Starting, he found the simple maid  
A simple maid no more.

But in her stead, a goddess proud,  
Celestial-fair in matchless grace,  
With something of a sorrow's cloud  
About her bending face.

Then, while the poor lad's trembling lips  
Some word of fitting homage sought,  
Gently she kiss'd her finger-tips,  
And vanish'd into naught.

. . . . .

So the young shepherd went his way,  
Nor ever told, by word or sign,  
How by a simple maid he lay,  
And tasted love divine.

And as for her, who learn'd in part,  
Through love, what love hath aye for gain—  
The hunger of the human heart,  
The passion and the pain,

*Unawares*

In her deep eyes that morn awoke  
A yearning not of heavenly birth,  
And her immortal beauty took  
The tenderness of earth.

## METHUSELAH

METHUSELAH, the Talmud says,  
Had not yet reckon'd half his days,  
When sitting once beneath his gourd  
To shade him from the noonday's glare,  
As in a vision wondrous fair  
He saw an angel of the Lord.

“Arise!” the angel cried, “O, now,  
Methuselah, why retest thou?  
Build straight a house for thine and thee;  
Firmly establish'd let it be;  
See that its well-knit timbers hold  
In summer's heat and winter's cold;  
See that its walls resist all strain  
Of beating sun or driving rain.  
Up, to the labours of thy hands—  
'T is thus, by me, the Lord commands!”

Methuselah a moment bow'd  
In silence. Then he spake aloud:—  
“First, will my Lord not answer sure  
How long my life may still endure?”

“Five hundred years, for good and ill,  
The Lord thy God will grant thee still.”

“Five hundred years!—and then to die?—”  
'T was thus the patriarch made reply;  
“Thy words are words of mockery.

'T were little worth thy servant's while  
To spend his strength and days in toil,  
To build a house whose walls shall be  
'Stablished for all futurity,  
When all that still before him lies  
Is summ'd in five short centuries.

“Build!—why, 't were sheer insanity  
Thus to prepare for life, when I  
Am called upon so soon to die!”

The patriarch spake: the angel sped,  
Nor on his errand came again.  
Five hundred years passed o'er the head  
Of old Methuselah—in vain:  
The house unbuilt did remain.

O Sons of mortals, ponder well  
The meaning of this parable!

## THRENODY

*Soles occidere et redire possunt.  
Nobis, quum simul occidit brevis lux,  
Nox est perpetua una dormienda.*

WHAT matter, though behind yon distant hills  
To-night the sun sinks down ?  
What matter though the lengthening darkness fills  
The valley and the town ?

Shall not the circling moments as of yore  
Roll round, and bring us soon,  
First the gray light of dawn, and then once more  
The fulness of the noon ?

What matter, though the winter's wind blows cold,  
And all is nipped and bare ?  
And not a flower is over all the wold,  
Nor bird along the air ?

Stern winter yet shall soften into spring  
With all its blithesome hours,  
And homing birds from sunny south-lands bring  
The golden charm of flowers.

Dead Nature takes new life upon the bier.  
Through all her mighty range  
Suns set and rise, and with the changing year  
The seasons merge and change.



For us, when once the sun has dipp'd his head—     *Threnody*  
The spring has taken flight—  
For us remains among the dreamless dead,  
The long and cheerless night.

## APPEARANCES

I N the city of my dreams,  
Where at times I dwell apart,  
Nothing is, but only seems—  
In the city of my dreams.

And I find them lovelier far,  
Deep within my secret heart,  
Things that seem than things that are—  
Yes, I find them lovelier far!

I am glad that in my dreams  
Nothing is, but only seems!

## THE BROTHERS

### I

WHEN they rose in the dawn from their  
slumbers,  
They thrill'd to behold  
The dull ruddy hues of the sunrise  
Blaze forth into gold.

Then their faces they turn'd to the eastward,  
As the glory grew bright,  
And gave praise to the Sun, the great giver  
Of life and of light.

The morn set their pulses a-dancing  
As a draught of new wine.  
Heroic the build of their manhood—  
Their beauty, divine.

The youth in their limbs was triumphant;  
And, like the clear skies,  
Serene and untroubled and cloudless  
The light in their eyes.

For lo, they were happy; for was not  
Their guerdon at birth  
Keen zest in the life of the senses,  
The gladness of earth?

And the zest and the gladness sufficed them,  
Nor felt they for dole  
The hunger and thirst of the spirit,  
The pangs of the soul.

II

But that night as they lay on the hillside,  
To their cool resting-place  
Came One in a vision, and hail'd them.  
They knew not His face.

It was ghastly and wan in the moonlight,  
And the brows were all wet,  
Beneath the thorn-circlet that bound them,  
With blood and with sweat.

And when with a gesture where pity  
And pleading were blent,  
He stretch'd forth His hands to the sleepers,  
As by nails they were rent.

Then the brothers were fill'd with confusion;  
Their wonder wax'd deep.  
Who was He that came thus in the darkness,  
To trouble their sleep?

What shade from the land of dim shadows?  
What god from some far,  
Strange barbarous folk who have dwelling  
Beneath the North Star?

Full ready were they to upbraid Him;  
And sharp to the tongue  
Leap'd the word of an angry dismissal.  
But ere it was flung,

The spell of the Presence o'ercame them.  
In that tremulous light,  
The Face, though worn thin as with anguish,  
Though haggard and white,

Was fill'd with a tender, sad beauty  
Undream'd of before.  
And those eyes—they seem'd half to compel them,  
And half to implore.

For wistful their gaze, and beseeching,  
Yet searching their power  
To wake something within they had felt not,  
Nor guess'd till that hour.

So He stood; and the marvel possess'd them  
Of what was to be;  
Till softly He broke the dread stillness: —  
“Arise! Follow me!”

Then they fain would have stay'd Him, and ques-  
tion'd;  
But durst not; and saw  
How He pass'd, and was not. And they trembled  
With wonder and awe!

To the vast silent sands of the desert  
He fled, as one flees  
From the foot and the knife of the slayer;  
And there on his knees

He wrestled and pray'd in his anguish  
Who never had yet  
Known the passion and pangs of the spirit,  
Its desire and regret.

And his face, like the face of the Master,  
Wax'd pallid and wan;  
And his eyes, which serene and untroubled  
Had welcom'd the dawn,

Grew sad with a wistful dumb yearning  
Which never had birth  
In the keen joyous life of the senses,  
The gladness of earth.

So he dwelt and he pray'd in the desert,  
The elder of those  
To whom the strange Vision had spoken  
In the night of repose.

Till at last the long conflict was over,  
And gently there stole  
A peace like the calm of the evening,  
Bringing rest to his soul.

O'er his head pass'd the years unrecorded,  
Till the day he was ware  
Of one standing beside him. He shielded  
His eyes from the glare,

And then—"O my brother! my brother,"  
He cried; "is it thou?  
Where now is thy lustre of manhood?  
Its glory—where now?"

"Oh, fresh was thy cheek, and unsullied,  
Once, brother!—thine eyes  
Serene and untroubled and cloudless  
Like the clear summer skies.

"But now thou art flush'd like a wanton  
Full-drunken with wine.  
Thy glance is the leer of the satyr!—  
I knew thee divine—

"In thy youth and thy strength and thy beauty  
I knew thee—and now,  
Thou art one with the beasts, O my brother!  
Is it thou? Is it thou?"

And loud laugh'd the youth, and his laughter  
Rang mirthless and shrill.  
"Who art thou to pass judgment upon me?  
I do as I will!

*The  
Brothers*

“When He found me — thy Master — and  
hail’d me,  
I heard and obey’d.  
I too fled afar to the desert;  
I wrestled and pray’d.

“For His power was upon me, and stirr’d me  
To torment within;  
O’er the joy of my life there had fallen  
The shadow of sin;

“And I thirsted, nor, thirsting, knew whither  
To turn in my drouth,  
For the waters of earth were as wormwood  
And gall in my mouth.

“Till one day in the midst of my anguish,  
Like a blind man restor’d,  
I saw of a sudden my folly —  
I saw, and abhorr’d.

“And alone with the sands of the desert  
I lifted my cry: —  
‘O Master of all disenchantment!  
Thy power I defy!

“‘By what right on my life, by what token,  
Thy law dost Thou lay?  
Are there those who are fain to obey Thee?—  
Let such then obey!



“ ‘ Let them learn of Thy lesson of sorrow — *The*  
Let them bow to Thy will! *Brothers*  
I was Lord of my lot; and behold me  
The Lord of it still!

“ ‘ Thou hast conquer’d not, O Galilean —  
Thou hast conquer’d not me!  
From the bondage in which Thou hast bound me  
I shake myself free!

“ ‘ I will stifle the cries and the anguish  
Of the soul in its birth!  
I will back to the life of the senses —  
The gladness of earth!’

“ ‘ So I fled from the desert!’ — ‘ O, brother,’  
The elder made moan,  
‘ Did’st thou find the old life that thou loved’st,  
The joy thou hadst known?’

“ ‘ For lo, thou art flush’d as a wanton  
New-drunken with wine.  
Where now is thy glory of manhood?  
Thy beauty divine?’ ”

And loud laugh’d the youth, and his laughter  
Rang mirthless and shrill —  
“ Who art thou to pass judgment upon me?  
I do as I will!

*The  
Brothers*

“ In vain shall thy great Disenchanter  
His will on me lay!”  
And he gather'd his raiment about him,  
And hasten'd away.

To the life he had lov'd ?—Nay; henceforward  
His doom had been seal'd;  
For his ways were the ways of the satyr,  
And the beasts of the field!

And he that was left in the desert  
Wept tears of despair;  
And not for himself, but his brother,  
He wrestled in prayer!

## Quatrains



## QUATRAINS

### THE PLAY

'T IS well that youth and love should have their  
day,  
Filling the stage with music and with magic.  
Let us laugh loudly while we can — the play  
In the fifth act is sure to turn to tragic.

### BREEZE AND GALE

T HAT very breeze which brought me the sweet  
strains  
From distant Arcady, that summer day,  
Had grown a gale which howl'd across the plains  
Ere night, and swept my music all away.

### LANCELOT AND ELAINE

N OT that she died. Dear child! for such a life,  
For such a love, what meeter end could be?  
But that he liv'd, torn through with mortal strife,  
A wreck of manhood — such the tragedy!

### THE BUILDING

S TONE upon stone! How little each one shows!  
Yet day by day slowly the building grows.  
And he who puts but one stone into line  
Helps to work out the Master's vast design.

**T**HIS same day's actions will to-morrow be  
Part of thy heritage of memory.  
Think well, how much each present, at the last,  
Of good or evil draws from out the past!

## MARY'S CRY

**O** WOMAN'S cry of love and sore despair,  
Echo'd how oft in this our later day:—  
“My dear Lord, they have taken him away!  
They have laid my Lord, the Christ, I know not  
where!”

## TO TENNYSON

**M**ASTER and Friend! Not mine to bring to  
thee  
The tribute of the critic's formal praise.  
Part of the sacred music of my days  
Thy song hath been, and evermore will be.

## THE CALIPH'S TOWER

**K**NOWLEDGE! — who boasts? — Does not  
the story tell  
How the great Caliph built his tower in vain?  
The Heavens were still as inaccessible  
As to the lowly dwellers on the plain!

**O**BSCENE imaginings — gibbering shapes im-  
pure—

The refuse of the gutter and the sewer:—  
With these the dreary unclean page is rife.  
And the great artist tells us — this is life.

TO ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

**M**ASTER, to thee our love and praise belong,  
That, in these days of sordid circumstance,  
Thou still could'st sing the old heroic song,  
Thou still hadst faith in things of high romance.

IRONY

**I**T stood a hundred years, a lonely giant,  
'Mid summer lightnings, winter storms, defiant.  
One hush'd night came a crash; and morning found  
The proud tree stretch'd in ruin on the ground.

“THE COMPLEAT ANGLER”

**N**O angler I; yet o'er thy pastoral page,  
Walton! in sooth full well I love to pore.  
It breathes the old-world peace we know no more  
In the mad rush and tumult of our age.

SAYS Science: "Lo, I lift the veil. Behold!"  
But when we turn, with eyes that almost fail,  
Before the Face in darkness from of old  
Shrouded, there hangs a yet unlifted veil.

## AT EARLY MORN

THIS is the hour when I would feel a thrill  
Of joy from beauty never to be born.  
What summer day did ever yet fulfil  
The dainty promise of its early morn?

## TO A SCIENTIFIC FRIEND

YOURS is a gospel for the strong and bold.  
But where shall one o'erladen and oppress'd  
Turn now to hear those gentle words of old:—  
"Come unto me, and I will give you rest"?

## CRISIS

A HALF-REPLY to some half-utter'd phrase—  
A light word spoken more than half in jest;  
And now I know that there, for worst or best,  
I reach'd a sudden parting of the ways!



SOME, with a careless glance, pass on; and some  
 Hither with ribald jest and laughter come.  
 From these apart, my silent hour I keep.  
 Knowing my loss, I bow my head, and weep.

## FROM THE SABINE FARM

SHALL I not laugh, when there is merry  
 laughter?  
 When there is mirth, shall I enjoy it not?  
 Even though I know that there will follow after  
 The silence that must close each human lot!

## CARPE DIEM

LIVE while you live. Life calls for all your  
 powers;  
 This instant day your utmost strength demands.  
 He wastes himself who stops to watch the sands,  
 And, miser-like, hoard up the golden hours.



